

What I Have Learned About Trainee Abuse

In two years of brigade command, the few instances of trainee abuse that have occurred have been sexually related. The cases involved primarily NCO instructors, but there was some drill sergeant involvement as well. While these occurrences are clearly wrong, the numbers are small and do not indicate systemic problems with the selection of instructors or drill sergeants, or a deficiency in the training of these individuals. In every case, the perpetrator was appropriately trained and yet made a conscious decision to do the wrong thing. Each took a risk and was caught either by the soldier coming forward, a battle buddy coming forward, or by using the EO or IG systems. The availability of the EO and IG systems is briefed to IET soldiers as a part of their in-processing. This system's visibility should be continued.

Maintenance of an appropriate training environment is essential. I have observed that permissive language leads to permissive behavior. Colorful language, cussing, and other than strict professional language necessary for training leads to jokes, then sexually oriented jokes, then familiar relationships, and ultimately inappropriate behavior. A contributing factor to inappropriate relationships has been a breakdown and violation of the battle buddy policy. The battle buddy requirements are well documented and known, but individuals who intentionally want to do the wrong thing find ways to get around the rules. Some measure of responsibility rests with the IET soldiers in training. These soldiers also know the rules, but some periodically violate the standard due to perceived influence by NCOs or the desire for attention.

Sensing sessions at all levels are important and should be emphasized. Sensing sessions conducted by company commanders and battalion commanders are mandatory. I have found that sensing sessions by the brigade commander are valuable as well. Sensing sessions should be routinely conducted with different audiences in relatively small groups (10-20 persons seems optimal). Differing sensing session audiences yields the best range of results. Audiences that have produced the desired range of results include: all female; all male; gender integrated; trainees who have recently arrived in the brigade; and trainees who are nearing IET graduation. Sensing sessions should be informal, non-attribution, and confidential. I conduct about half of the sensing sessions together with my spouse. I have found that including my spouse works well and yields some information that helps to identify emerging problems that may grow into true trainee abuse.

In my part of the training base, we have implemented an automated end-of- course critique system. This system allows a trainee to input information on inappropriate behavior in a totally nonthreatening, confidential, and nonpublic manner. This system periodically generates information that leaders need to know. Automated end-of-course critiques should be implemented across the IET training base.

Training for Shared Instructors on TRADOC Regulation 350-6 should be mandatory. Shared Instructors (NCO students in NCOES supporting FTXs, physical fitness training, etc.) should have a working knowledge of enlisted initial entry training policies and administration. While I have not experienced incidents of trainee abuse by NCO students, the potential exists. We should provide the training as a preventive measure.

Alcohol often contributes to inappropriate behavior and trainee abuse. This is not an issue during duty hours and on the installation, as alcohol consumption is prohibited for most IET soldiers. When IET soldiers are on pass off installation and intersect with NCO Instructors or Drill Sergeants, the presence of alcohol often contributes to behavior issues. NCOs drinking alcohol with trainees should never be permitted.